Driftwood.

First poems of Robert Service
to be published in booklet form
for Private Circulation
Sydney, N.S., 1898

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Note: The lady to whom
the Copy was first presented
became Service's wife.

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Correspondence Rec. R. W. Journal
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Miss Robert Norris

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Driftwood

"Virginibus puerisque"

C. W. Vernon
R. W. Norwood

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North Sydney, December 1898

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The Song of the Sea.

The Song of the Land 's the love of the birds,
The sunbeam's kiss as he wanders free,
The wooing of flowers and the tree's desire,
But the Song of the Sea 's the song for me.

For the Sea you know is a songster bold,
And he sings in an unconventional way;
With a roar and a will he trills his lay,
Regardless of aught that the world may say.

He 's a Song for every day of the year,
Melodies thrilling with laughter and joy,
Bars full of sadness and notes of pain,
Heart-songs of nature that sea nymphs employ.

With his swinging gait and his deep bass voice,
He chanteth a ballad of pirates bold,
Sagas of heroes and lays of the North,
Runes of the Norsemen in letters of gold.

In his wild embrace he seizes the Shore,
When his bosom swells with the urge of desire,
When he weds his bride at the shut of day,
His face is aglow with a mystic fire.

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Though his manners are rough, his words are soft,
And his eyes are lit with the light of love,
And the soul of his bride is free and proud,
As he sings of his love to the stars above.

On a stormy night his notes are fierce,
And thrill with a warrior's lust for blood;
With a wild delight he shatters the ships,
And hurtles the dead o'er his foam-flecked flood.

But sometimes he crooneth a cradle song
For the mermaid's children under the wave,
And anon there steals through the fog and mist
His mournful dirge o'er a mariner's grave.

His song is the rush of the landward wave,
The gentle ebb of the seaward tide;
The moonlight's glamour, the glint of the sun,
The fragrance of flowers that his billows hide,

The wondrous lore that nobody knows
Save the crawling creatures under the main;
The thoughts of the drowned, and the seaweed's dreams,
The music of shells, the ripples' refrain.

The Song of the Land 's the love of the birds,
The sunbeam's kiss as he wanders free,
The wooing of flowers and the trees' desire,
But the song of the Sea is the song for me.

A Reverie

The green sea surges up to land,
I feel its salt breath on my cheek,
In deep-throated tones it seems to speak
As it falls thund'ring, seething on the sand.

The wild gulls circling sweep and cry,
A thin mist veils the crimson west;
The great red sun sinks glowing down to rest,
Its dying flame crawls flickering up the sky;

Deep darkness, and the sullen boom
Of sea receding into dark;
I hear a faint "hoi, heave, hoi!" I mark
A vessel's dancing lights that pierce the gloom.

And through the din of raging sea
That foams and boils across the bar,
Through night that wraps me in, from star to star,
Great God of seas, my spirit yearns to thee.

Robert Norwood

Dusk

Dusk, and all the wood in slumber,
  Grey mists rising from the lake
On whose shores the tall grass trembles,
  On whose breast the lilies shake.

Dusk, and slumber on the meadows,
  Twilight blurring ev'ry hill,
Down whose sides the streams thin-threading
  Night with music faintly fill.

Dusk, and lo! the night wind rising
  With soft whispers stirs the leaves,
Mingling with the drowsy twittering
  Of the swallows 'neath the eaves.

Dusk, and maiden, as you ask me
  What the voices in the leaves,
What they say as twitter, twitter,
  Sleepy swallows 'neath the eaves?

Bend your proud head lower, lower,
  In the dusk you are so fair! -
What they say as night wind rises?
  What I would - and do not dare!

Robert Norwood

To Her

Maiden with winsome face,
  Sweet with fair simplicity,
In thine eye love's well of grace
  Sparkles free.

Maiden with the eyes of blue,
  Thoughtful, clear and liquid deep,
On thy lips of coral hue
  Kisses sleep.

Maiden with the lips rose-fair,
  Sweetly pretty when they pout,
Lovelily thy gold-brown hair
  Falls about.

Maiden with the sunlit hair,
  What the witchery divine,
That so strangely tangles there
  Heart of mine?

A Tale of Love

A tale of love! How many we have read,
  And mused, and musing asked how true it be;
Sweet days of love! How like a dream, and yet,
  Though dreamlike, are they true to you and me.

Each for himself the tale of love must write.
Some tell of surging seas, and billows wild,
The tumults, anguishes and doubts of love,
Others the calm sweet dream-life of a child.

For love has many hues and forms. He comes
In strangely varying ways. For no two minds
Like visions gleam. Yet each in his degree
Sees Truth and knows it in the love he finds.

One Summer Long Ago

We stood beside the brimming lake
One summer long ago,
And watched the wondrous hues forsake
The sunset's ruddy glow,
And watched until from hill to hill
A purple mist out-spread,
And through the trees a passing breeze,
Whispered: "The day is dead!"
One summer long ago.

Ah, you were young, and sweet, and fair,
That summer long ago,
When watched we dimming daylight wear
To sunset's ruddy glow,
And watched the stream glance, glint and gleam,
Reflect the sky's dull red,
And whispering low in rhythmic flow,
Murmured: "The day is dead,"
One summer long ago.

But years have passed long, long since, sweet,
One summer long ago.
I sat in silence at your feet,
And watched the sunset glow,
Long years! and yet I'll ne'er forget,
Though months and years have sped,
That first love-look, as the hidden brook
Babbled: "The day is dead!"
One summer long ago.

Robert Norwood

Charles G. D. Roberts – Ah this above are my early scribbles.

Memory

Visions of a summer sea
Clear sparkling in the sun,
And beetling cliffs with sea-worn rifts,
And damp, dark caves incessantly
The ocean's low monotonous moan
Echoing, Echoing.

A ship that looms above
The sky's dim, distant sweep,
Through lambent shroud of fleecy cloud
O'er hanging it like brooding dove;
And shore-ward flung, the wild waves leap
Echoing, Echoing.

On sweeps the stately ship
And o'er the tossing main,
On, on, until from brow of hill
I see it, fading, farewell dip,
And in my heart a suageless strain,
Echoing, Echoing.

Robert Norwood

Seawards

Slowly drifting down the river
In the moonlight soft and bright;
On the banks the aspens quiver,
With the rapture of the night.

With the tide my row-boat gliding
Scarcely moving seems to me,
Down the stream's dark bosom sliding,
Heaving in its mystery.

Like God's starlight, deep and bright,
Lilla's eyes with mystic wonder
Hold me spell-bound in their might,
Rending all my soul asunder.

Lilla's hair, like chains of gold,
Binding all my heart about,
Whilst my fingers, fondly bold,
Wander through it, in and out.

Lilla's bosom gently rising,
Falling slow in measured beat,
Fills my own with fond surmising;
Holds me tranced at her feet.

Slowly drifting, all enraptured,
Slowly to the boundless sea,
Lilla with her prisoner captured,
I, her captive, held in fee.

Hark! upon the distant shore,
Waves, their billows landward flinging,
Echo with a murmurous roar,
Now like sea-nymphs sweetly singing,

Now with anger in their tone,
Dashing fiercely on the strand;
Now all sadly making moan,
Rolling backward o'er the sand.

Lilla, shall we find good sailing
When we reach the ocean's bound?
On the billows wildly wailing,
Raging, roaring in the sound?

Lilla, thou a sea-king's child,
Daughter thou of ancient Viking,
I at heart a Norseman wild;
Still we have the old-time liking,

Still within our veins the Norse blood
Makes us love the sea's unrest,
Feel, e'en now, its foaming flood
Boiling, surging through our breast.

Slowly drifting down the river
In the moonlight soft and bright;
On the banks the aspens quiver
With the rapture of the night.

My first attempt at the Sonnet

Dawn

Dawn! and the joyous song of budding spring,
With scent of flowers and smiling sky,
The swirl of swollen waters rushing by,
The ceaseless surge, the wild, resonant ring
Of wind-tossed, foam-capped seas that landward fling,
The balmy breath, the great, deep, indrawn sigh
Of the awakening forest rearing high
To morn its giant pines that dip and swing;
And in the wild exultance of the dawn,
That deeply thrills the inmost life of things,
With awe I lift my head to God who brings
The new from out the old and smiles upon
The blue above, fields, woods, and sparkling rills,
And th' Eternal loom of the western hills.

Robert Norwood

The Eucharist of Earth

Early morn and all the forest
Waking joyous from the night;
Every blade and every floweret
Radiant in the crystal light.

Dewdrops glisten on the branches,
Gem-like glow on every blade,
While, like altar lights, the sunbeams,
Gleam throughout the happy glade.

All the choristers of spring-time,
Warble notes of Easter praise,
Whilst the brooklets all chant Gloria,
Babbling down their stony ways.

Breath of morn and scent of flowers
From each tiny censer swings,
When the harebell through the stillness,
Lowly bowed, the Sanctus rings,

While the priests of God, the lilies,
Chasubled in samite white,
Pearl-bedecked and gold-embroidered,
Offer up the glorious rite.

All with awe before the Presence,
Round the altar lowly pray,
When Earth's Eucharist of gladness,
God's pure lilies sweetly say.

May-flowers

Breath of forest here exhaling,
From these fragile creatures rare,
Whisper, tell me of the new life
Which awakens there.

Tell me how the quick'ning sunlight,
Slanting through the swaying trees,
Kisses every fragrant flower
Delicate as these.

Promise me the deep-felt rapture
I have known each gladd'ning spring,
When I lay and watched the tree-tops
Dip and sway and swing.

Breath of forest, angel whispers
These pure mayflowers waft to me -
Tell me how the woods of Eden
Buds put forth with thee?

And they tell me of a spring-time
Coming in the by-and-by,
When in Eden I shall watch the
Tree-tops sweep the sky.

Two Souls

"Animae omnes sunt Mihi."

The Lake, methinks, is like the forest's soul,
For in its stilly water lies,
With awe held up before the face of God,
A mirror of its mysteries.

The human, like the wilding forest's soul,
Fulfilled with strange desire and whim
And every ecstacy of dream, reflects
The perfect vision but to Him.

Beyond the Hills

This side the hills in the early morn
When their heads are kissed by the golden light,
And the song of the river is faintly borne
Welcoming day in her mantle bright,
Ah! I yearn as I journey along the way
Just to catch one glimpse of the peaceful land,
That sunny land where 'tis always day;
But the road winds far from the place I stand
To those fields of bliss beyond the hills.

This side the hills in the sultry noon
When their blue heights flash through the quiv'ring heat
And the brooks and the rivers drowsily croon
To the slumbering meadows in ditties sweet,
Midst the rush and the roar of the world-wide strife,
My footsteps falter on the weary way,
And I fain would rest; but the fuller life,
Lies there and a grand and a perfect day
In that dim dream-land beyond the hills.

This side the hills in the after glow
Of the crimson sunset that flames afar,
In the dusk that throbs with the rythmic flow
Of the murmuring sea on the sandy bar,
At the close of day in the gathering night
When the world recedes in the darkening past,
I fall as I grope for the dimming light,
But I know I shall wake from sleep at last
To day that ends not beyond the hills.

Robert Norwood

Beyond the Hills

'T is autumn and a glimmering sheen,
  Of light floods with its tranquil rays,
Alike the spreading marshlands
  And the brown Avon's winding ways.
No more is heard the whir
  Of myriad insects. All is still.
Our souls fulfilled with stillness,
  With vague unutterable longings thrill.

Comrades together oft before
We too have found the words to say
Of joys and pains, but here at last
No words will come, for now today
Our souls reach out beyond the hills,
Whose slope of mingled green and gold
Encircle all the landscape round.
They seek a larger vision than of old.

Beyond the hills what is there?
That we wist not, yet we yearn
To see the broader prospect;
We ache the wider view to learn.
Sweet as the Summer of All Saints
This life may sometimes seem to be,
Yet, frenzied with a passionate desire,
We crave the great beyond to see.

We listen and we think we hear
  The murmurous roaring on the shore
Of God's great boundless sea.
  Strive as we may, we hear no more.
Yet hark again! – 't is there. –
  Alas! the fancy comes and goes.
All that of wider view there is
  Beyond the hills, One only knows.

When Day departs

When day departs – ere the lights are lit –
  By the fireside's soothing glow,
'Tween waking and sleeping I love to sit
  With my thoughts of a long ago.

A long ago! ah, dear, sunny days
  Of a youth that was yet untried,
When joying and working I chose the ways
  That led to this eventide.

This eventide with its tale of years
And rush of its memories rare,
That stealing and thrilling compell the tears
For those days beyond compare.

Beyond compare! and each well-known face
Of the friends of the long ago;
Half dreaming, half waking, their names I trace
In the flame of the fireside's glow.

And ever, ever, while the long days fly,
Comes the time of the fireside's glow,
'Tween waking and sleeping I sit and sigh
For the friends of a long ago.

Robert Vrnon

I have always seen and
still see that the poems
by Mrs. Vernon in this
collection were written
by C. J. Vernon.

Robert Vrnon.